

Russia – Ukraine Conflict

The Kremlin helped make Dmytro Firtash rich, Now he's denouncing Putin

In an exclusive interview with NBC News, billionaire Dmytro Firtash said the Russian president cannot win in Ukraine: “He is never going to come out victorious.”



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By Tom Winter and Ken Dilanian

A Ukrainian oligarch who made his fortune with help from the Kremlin is now denouncing Vladimir Putin, even as he fights extradition to the U.S. on corruption charges.

DISSEMINATED BY DAVIS GOLDBERG GALPER, A REGISTERED FOREIGN AGENT, ON BEHALF OF DMITRYO FIRTASH. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE AT THE US DEPT OF JUSTICE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

In an exclusive interview with NBC News while under house arrest in Austria, billionaire [Dmytro Firtash](#) said the Russian president cannot win in [Ukraine](#).

“He is never going to come out victorious,” said Firtash, who became fabulously rich selling Russian natural gas to Ukraine with the help of powerful Russian interests. “No matter what happens, Russia will lose.”

If he could, Firtash said he would tell Putin: “It’s time to stop. There will be no victory. The longer this war takes, the worse it will be for the Russian people. Not just for the Ukrainian people.”

Firtash’s comments came after the Russian banking tycoon [Oleg Tinkov](#) last week denounced what he called Moscow’s “massacre” in [Ukraine](#) and urged the West to help end “this insane war.” Other oligarchs, including Oleg Deripaska, have called for an end to the war without directly criticizing Putin.

Critics will note that Firtash’s break with Moscow may align with his current interests, given that the U.S. Justice Department is trying to extradite him to face charges of a conspiracy to pay bribes in India while seeking a deal to supply specialized metal for Boeing’s 787 Dreamliner.

From a snow-white office adorned with a map of Eastern Europe and Russia and a painting of his home village, Firtash suggested that he has often placed his business interests above his personal views.

“I was never pro-Russian,” he said. “But you have to understand that I am a businessman. And my goal is to earn money. That’s my job.”

Asked if he worried he was risking his life by speaking against Putin now, he answered: “It’s hard to say. But my understanding of this is simple. I don’t really have a choice. ... To believe that in 2022, in the center of Europe, that such a massacre can be taking place, no normal person could believe it.”

A former U.S. official familiar with Firtash said: “Firtash knows that the influence of his Kremlin handlers has been substantially reduced in Austria, who have been able to slow and thus far prevent his extradition to the U.S., so he’s trying to find other patrons. But I doubt anyone in Ukraine will be willing to save him.”

Request # 1

– please delete this paragraph entirely since it is an anonymous attack on character (falsely inferring that Firtash had “Kremlin handler”) – and thus, we submit, contrary to NBC and other MSM ground rules not permitting anonymous personal attacks on character or reputation.

If you won't delete, then I ask that I be quoted, as attorney for Mr. Firtash, as follows:

“This anonymous commentator makes a false, defamatory charge, without a single fact to support it, that Mr. Firtash was subject to any “Kremlin handlers.” If the anonymous individual were not a coward hiding behind anonymity, he or she would go on the record and thus be subject to accountability for malicious defamation.

John Herbst, a former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, said he found Firtash's comments “a little risky for him.”

“It's a clear play not just for (Ukrainian President Volodymyr) Zelenskyy's support but for the United States,” said Herbst, who described Firtash as a “pragmatic and self-interested man.”

“Whether it helps him, that's highly unlikely.”

Eight years of house arrest

After paying the largest bail bond in Austrian history — \$174 million — Firtash has been living under house arrest for the past eight years in a Vienna compound, [as he fights extradition](#) to the U.S.

He told NBC News he is “100 percent not guilty.”

Asked about a specific filing in the case alleging links between him and [Russian organized crime](#), his lawyer quickly interjected.

“As I discussed with you, we're in the middle of a criminal case,” said Lanny Davis, who represented President Bill Clinton during the Monica Lewinsky scandal. He called the prosecutors' filing “improper” and said he had “instructed Mr. Firtash not to dignify by answering.”

The organized crime allegations have dogged Firtash for years.

After the Soviet Union collapsed, he considered becoming a fireman, Firtash told the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine in 2008 — but opted to start a dry milk and cannery company.

According to diplomatic cables made public by WikiLeaks, Firtash told American officials that he came to know powerful Russian businessmen through his commodities business, which led him to launch a company that would become a huge player in the Central Asian natural gas market.

Firtash and a partner formed EuroTransGas company in 2002 and began making deals with central Asian countries.

According to the State Department cables, Firtash acknowledged meeting in January 2002 with [Semion Mogilevich](#), who at the time was deemed by U.S. officials one of the world's most dangerous Russian mobsters.

"Firtash acknowledged that he needed, and received, permission from Mogilevich when he established various businesses, but he denied any close relationship to him," a State Department cable says.

If you wanted to do business in Ukraine in the early 2000s, the cables say Firtash told the Americans, you had to get along with Russian organized crime figures.

Request # 2

Lanny Davis, Firtash's lawyer, disagreed with this assertion, stating: "As Mr. Firtash has previously stated publicly, he has denied any business or any business or other relationship with Russian organized crime or any particular organized crime – nor ever sought permission or shared any revenues with any such organized crime figure."

The Kremlin helped make this Ukrainian oligarch rich. Now he says Putin can't win.

"It was impossible to approach a government official for any reason without also meeting with an organized crime member at the same time," one cable says Firtash told U.S. officials.

Request #3:

Later cables say Firtash, **with the mob's blessing**,

Mr. Davis states:

"The phrase 'with the mob's blessing' is false. Either delete entirely or quote me as stating it is "false. No blessing was sought or obtained by Mr. Firtash from any member of Russian organized crime."

Firtash made a fortune in the gas business. But after the "[Orange Revolution](#)" deposed Ukraine's pro-Russian leaders in 2014, the new government struck a deal on natural gas, depriving Firtash of a major revenue stream.

Anders Aslund, a former Swedish diplomat who has studied Ukraine's economy for years, told NBC News in 2020 Firtash is more of a purveyor of bribes than a proper businessman.

Request # 4

“He has essentially been used by the Russians to buy political power in Ukraine,” said Aslund, now a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, a think tank. “He’s the person who has spent the most money on behalf of the Kremlin on Ukraine’s politicians.”

Rebuttal by Lanny Davis, attorney for Firtash:

“Mr. Aslund has made a malicious, false, defamatory statement, with no basis in any facts. Mr. Firtash was not been used “by the Russians” nor has spent money “on behalf of the Kremlin.” We will be in contact with him or his counsel demanding a retraction.”

Firtash argues his political activity is not much different from U.S. businessmen.

“Take tens of names from the U.S., be it (Mark) Zuckerberg or anyone else, they have two tasks: Their business — they’re responsible for this, they answer for it, and, of course, big business often has links to politics.”

“It doesn’t control politicians, but it depends on politicians, the same way that politicians rely on big business.”

Firtash and His Denial of being part of “Team Giuliani”

Request # 5: Please delete or change this subhead – as indicated in italics.

Firtash wouldn’t discuss his alleged organized crime connections on advice of his legal counsel, Mr. Davis. Davis explained: “The charge made by prosecutors of involvement with organized crime were not contained in the indictment. The assertion in open court without evidence is improper, in my view, under DOJ and other guidelines. That is why I instructed Mr. Firtash not to dignify this utterly false charge with a response.”

But he did speak to his alleged role in the case that led to former President Donald Trump’s first impeachment.

Lev Parnas, who was convicted in October on campaign finances charges, said back in 2020 that he had received \$1 million from Firtash-linked entities as part of

a deal to help Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani dig up dirt on then-candidate Joe Biden's dealings in Ukraine.

Parnas said there was a quid pro quo: If Firtash helped smear Biden, two Trump-linked lawyers would make the criminal case against Firtash go away. All involved deny this, but the two lawyers provided a now-discredited affidavit secured by Firtash from a Ukrainian prosecutor accusing Biden of wrongdoing.

Request # 6

Please include rebuttal from Lanny Davis, attorney for Mr. Firtash

Davis denied the veracity of Mr. Parnas's assertions that Mr. Firtash was part of any quid pro quo agreement with Giuliani or anyone else in the scheme to dig up dirt on Joe Biden and his son. In fact, as he stated to NBC, the New York Times and many other media organizations, he never met with, talked to, or had anything to do with those Giuliani activities. Nor did he ever know about or authorize anyone to assist or participate in such a scheme."

Giuliani's team did not deliver.

According to Parnas and a senior U.S. official, the lawyers — Giuliani associates Joe DiGenova and Victoria Toensing — were unable to convince Attorney General William Barr to intervene in the Firtash case.

Firtash's name also came up during the Trump Russia investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller. Investigators tried to convince him to become a cooperating witness to provide information on a Trump insider he'd known for years: Paul Manafort, the one-time chair of Trump's 2016 presidential campaign and a former consultant to pro-Russian Ukrainian politicians.

In 2008, court filings show the two pursued but didn't complete a deal to develop a hotel in New York city.

"All I can say is that I never did business with Manafort," Firtash said. "They never received money from me. And I never bought anything from them."

Shown an agreement to do business with Manafort, Firtash says it was never executed.

Firtash says he will fight the U.S. criminal case in court if it comes to that. But says he'd rather go back to Ukraine to fight the Russians.

He says he spends his time now focusing on providing logistics support for supplies in Ukraine and working with four other oligarchs to provide public service television programming with the help of the Zelenskyy administration. One channel focuses on war information for Ukrainians, and a Russian-speaking channel run out of Poland targets the Russian people.

He says as much as 15 percent of his workforce has left to fight the Russians, and eight of his employees have died.

“It is a singular nation. A single people,” he said of Ukraine. “And for this we have to say a big thank you to Mr. Putin. And I believe that we should be building him a monument in the very center of Ukraine. Because he turned out to be the only politician that in the last 30 years managed to unite the country as one whole.”

Tom Winter is a New York-based correspondent covering crime, courts, terrorism and financial fraud on the East Coast for the NBC News Investigative Unit.

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Dan De Luce contributed.

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